

## DEMAN Live: Late Night, Comedy & Political Satire

This episode features a conversation with Duke alumni working across the country in late night, comedy, and political satire, moderated by Inside Joke's Chloe McGlynn '20 and Duke University Improv's Teig Hennessy '20.

### Panel

- Adam Chodikoff '93, senior producer, [The Daily Show](#)
- Paul W. Downs '04, [actor/writer/executive producer](#) (including [Hacks](#), [Broad City](#))
- Dillon Fernando '18, senior researcher, [Full Frontal with Samantha Bee](#)
- Sofia Manfredi '15, former writer, [Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj](#)
- Ishan Thakore '15, associate producer, [Full Frontal with Samantha Bee](#)
- Andrew Tunnard '08, Director, Entertainment Business Affairs (includes [The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon](#))
- Laura Valk '13, senior segment producer, [Full Frontal with Samantha Bee](#); former production supervisor, [Saturday Night Live](#)
- Seth Weitberg '03, Executive Producer, [Game Theory with Bomani Jones](#); former senior writer, [Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj](#)

INTRO: Dave Karger

Welcome to DEMAN Live. I'm DAVE KARGER, Duke alum and host on Turner Classic Movies. DEMAN is the Duke Entertainment, Media and Arts Network. And it's the University's hub for the creative industries. On this show, you'll hear a past episodes of DEMAN live, which includes panels and one on one chats with alumni. Thanks so much for listening and enjoy.

16:26 Teig Hennessy '20

We're gonna go ahead and jump into questions now. So the first thing we just want to ask Paul and Laura, what does your job look like now as you work from home? Um, and do you have any tips for graduating seniors or alumni who are looking to break into the industry? Like how could they using this time?

16:54 Laura Valk

I'm working from home is odd, I think you have to be forgiving of yourself a little bit. It's, it's a lot of self-discipline. And the good thing about that is it's it's kind of transferable to like being a senior in college, I would think we're, you're kind of responsible for, for taking the reins yourself.

For me, it's it's very odd not to have human interaction. And a lot of my job is kind of screening things that happen on TV, through the production funnel that happens, which doesn't go very well over zoom sometimes or G-chat. But it's odd, I missed the human connection. But we're surviving. And I'm really grateful to have a job.

And I think my advice to seniors now who are who are trying to do stuff or trying to get into this is just like, be super patient with yourself. Like I would tell you that even without a pandemic, but like with a

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pandemic, be 10 times as patient with yourself and with the industry. Don't worry about landing like a dream job right away. Because you have to be realistic with what's out there. And I always just say, like, make stuff yourself, no matter what. Always be having, like, make a side project for free on your iPhone, you can make funny stuff on Tik Tok like it's, that's that's kind of what I always think somebody should do.

18:25 Paul W. Downs

I agree, I think it's such a weird time right now. But it's it's really it is a true ? to be able to continue to write from home because you can write anywhere. And we are about to start a writers room, which over zoom might be really strange. It is without human connection. And being in the room to pitch with people might be really odd, but we feel lucky to be able to do it. And I think my advice would be similar. It would be if you're home, try your best to make things. You just write something if you want to be a writer. You know, write a spec, write a spec pilot or spec feature. If you want to be a performer write something that you can perform. You know, I think it is hard to focus, with so much, so much news coming at you all the time and so much that's unknown about what the future will hold. But I think if you can, you can get something done every day, that's great. We have been doing one scene a day, which I'm like, that's huge. It's really, really good. So I think if you can set a small goal for yourself and try to focus and do that, using this time to be productive is will be hugely valuable.

19:39 Chloe McGlynn '20

Thank you. No, that's super valuable. And I think that that translates really well into our next question, which is kind of directed towards Sofia and Ishan, what are your suggestions for how students and alumni can navigate their internship and job search during these times? And you guys spoke to that a little bit but more special civically? How can students and alumni find a balance between staying in touch with alumni about career opportunities during this time? And also respecting that people might be facing different challenges right now? Yeah,

20:16 Sofia Manfredi

I think awareness, right, that the industry is not what it normally would be, which I think like, I'm sure every Duke student has, and like everybody has. And I think maybe looking to people that you would reach out to, to find out about opportunities or about something like a little bit more concrete, concrete, maybe do those more as, like, general advice, emails, or calls or just like, I don't know, I think reaching out to people, and kind of putting your name in their head.

And, you know, asking questions, and communicating with them is great. And when things do start up again, then, you know, maybe there's a time to kind of like, depending on that is, I would hate to, like, even guess right now. And I think then that's like, maybe a time to like, follow up with somebody or just like, remind them that, you know, you had spoken before, but I think kind of just like being aware that maybe now's the time to like gather all the information that will like, help you take action when it is like possible to, I don't know if what I'm saying is making sense.

But it feels like everybody on both ends of it is kind of stuck in the like, I'm going to prepare for what I think will be helpful. And I think the most that you can kind of get from somebody is probably just like honest conversation and advice and maybe like a pair of helpful eyes. And I'm sure it just if you you

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know, are like, I don't know, just like send out, you know, polite email and don't like do anything too crazy people will probably they might send a delayed response or like a, you know, I think people would would be as happy to help as they like normally would be.

22:07 Ishan Thakore

Yeah, I echo that too. And say like, to just to be cognizant of which particular jobs are also like more effective, so more affected right now. So like, I work on the field producing side of the show. So a lot of our cinematographers, lighting people, set PAs have been like, particularly affected amount of work because there's like no on-set jobs.

So just being mindful of like, when you do reach out to someone like that, that, you know, their situation might be a little more precarious, as well. And then also in terms of like, you know, how to navigate an internship and job search. Like there's a lot of sort of like professional groups, you can kind of join when you move to like, New York or LA or DC.

So like one group that's like really helped me a lot is called Video Consortium. And I think they have chapters like all around the world now. But they, they post like, kind of video jobs and openings. It's a lot of it's geared towards documentary, but I think they also like work in the scripted world as well. And that's been good. They've been posting a lot of like, opportunities for filmmakers, you know, people who do stuff independently COVID relief funds, if you're a freelancer and stuff, so they've been sort of like, I found that to be like, super helpful for my friends, also, who were who were kind of out of work.

23:33 Teig Hennessy '20

Yeah, that'd be awesome. Thanks so much. Um, okay, so our next question is going to be directed towards Adam and Andrew. And so sort of like in your roles as producers and as legal counsel, what does it look like when you're interacting with staff every day over video chat and that sort of thing? Um, and like, has the current situation affected the way that you're booking guests, and conducting interviews and that sort of stuff? And anyone from Full Frontal and Patriot Act feel free to jump in on that one as well.

24:04 Adam Chodikoff

Can I go?

24:05 Andrew Tunnard

Yeah, go ahead.

24:06 Adam Chodikoff

Okay, um, I don't do this my first ever like zoom chat. I communicate via email and you know, it's with the head writers attend at 10pm. Around every night, the head writer will send out a mass email to the writers and the researchers and the producers.

Here's the stuff we're considering doing in the show tomorrow. And then I checked on Scripto, our script program, in the morning around 10am is a script what we call a no joke script, in which they're all setups all set up for jokes and I check to see if we have any, you know, false premises, or are there

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any errors in the setups and then once in the writers get assigned to write jokes to the setups and then later in the day, I'll get a notice are here's the rough scripts, and then I'll go really go into fact checking in research mode and go through line by line point by point.

And to send emails, I mean, I there's no need for me to do a video chats or they can just call me on the phone. I remember calling people on the phone? You know, so. And when I write get questions like, yes, like today I was reading questions for Governor Murphy. We had we have in the show, the Governor of New Jersey, and I don't I don't book the guests. But the the guest producer will say, Here's Senator (?) Murphy, we've got him on, you know, and then I'll just start typing up questions, Email tour, and then Trevor will look at it during the day. And he might do it, he might not but so the main, you know, differences just a lot more emailing, you know, a lot more emailing back and forth, and communicating via email, and I'm just, you know, so.

25:47 Andrew Tunnard

Yeah, I agree. I think, you know, when I started as the Tonight Show, lawyer, as the new lawyer, everyone kind of was a little wary of me, the writers and the producers sort of want to come to me through someone else, because they just assumed the lawyer is gonna raise a red flag, sound, the alarm bell, whatever, and it took some time.

But you know, having the relationships I do with our producers and our writers and our, you know, segment directors, it got to the point where, before we left the office, I was interacting face to face with them a lot of the week, at the very least on the phone, most of the day. And I think it took us a couple weeks to kind of get in a groove of all left 30 Rock and went into quarantine, because this picture themselves are all sort of, you know, are the 30 Rock and they can walk down the hall and ask people questions, and so many people don't even need to come to me for stuff.

But now I'm actually finding that I'm having way more conversations with people who can't just yell down in the hallway or to the cube next, for answers to things. And you know, there have been there are people who have been there when it was Late Night with Jimmy Fallon, who were SNL before that with Jimmy, who would Jimmy for, you know, 15 years.

And without that access, everything, you know, it takes a little more time. And because we're operating on such a frenetic pace, we need answers quickly. And often I'm sort of at the receiving end of a lot of questions, which it's been difficult to navigate, but for me is great, because I really do love the sort of the human interaction component, even if it is over Zoom. So it was a challenge. I think for the first couple of weeks. I think now we sort of we're in a groove, things aren't as frantic, but still very, very busy and a lot of phone calls and emails all day.

27:34 Chloe McGlynn '20

Awesome. Did Laura, Dillon or Ishan want to jump in on that at all? Or?

27:41 Dillon Fernando

Oh, sure, we can. I think the way that we interact, I like our system a lot. We kind of all do this chaotic Slack meeting on on a Thursday, and we decide what we want to do on the show that Wednesday. And

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I think it's really, everyone's like, throwing in their two cents for what we want to do on the show. And I think people are very receptive to that. And that's one thing I like about the way we're doing the show right now is everyone, I think everyone kind of feels like we want to document the times of this of this moment.

And so like, whatever everyone's passionate about, like, we're gonna try to make a segment or like, do something that kind of reflects that, which I really like. We do a lot of a lot of Slacking, we do a lot of like, Gmail, like kind of Zoom situations. Honestly, I most of my job is slacking people. So I don't really see too much of a difference. But yeah, I think we like we're still like on calls with the writers. And we're, you know, still making sure we're like fact checking stuff as they do rewrites. And I think it's business as usual, but just in a different place.

28:50 Ishan Thakore

Yeah, it's been, I work on the field side of things. So we've been like, when we've been pulling segments together, it's been really weird because a video editor will share their screen, over zoom while they're like cutting a segment and then a producer. And I will be like, offering notes on a cut, and then everyone's video freezes.

And then it's been like, really kind of strange and a little bit frustrating. And doing interviews over Zoom is also like, you know, producing them a resume is kind of weird, because you're, you're kind of like offering direction and everyone's a little uncomfortable and stuff. But so that's sort of like completely changed, I think, like how our team does like any sort of interviewing. But what has been nice is that access seems to be a little bit easier.

So like we interviewed Elizabeth Warren last week, and that was like, it felt like impossible to get. You know, we've been trying for months the interview her. Obviously, she was running for President at some point and then when I'm sure her schedule is much freer when she dropped out, but it seemed like a much easier ask over zoom for like 30 minutes and stuff. So it seems like some avenues open up that way which has been kinda cool.

30:04 Laura Valk

I think you guys covered it. I will just say for anyone who doesn't know what slack is, which I didn't know until last year, because at SNL, we only used truly like hand like hardline phones, which is insane. But Slack is like a, like an instant message thing, which now is my entire life. So I feel like I should make that clear to people who might not know like.

30:30 Chloe McGlynn '20

Yeah, thank you so much, you guys for that. So the next question is about, and we kind of addressed this a little bit earlier, but getting your foot in the door to work in your industry is already challenging. So what advice you have for students and alums trying to break into the industry at this time, we talked about doing creative work on your own. But do you recommend that students look for and find kind of non paid volunteer opportunities, maybe something they can do remotely? Especially now, when so many internships are canceled? I think people are looking to what can they possibly do with

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this time? And if you guys, Seth and Dillon, specifically, if you have any experiences with working with other interns, or talking to students about opportunities? How might you answer that question?

31:23 Seth Weitberg

Uh sure. Yeah, I mean, I think as far as unpaid opportunities go, I've always been of the mindset that you should try to that if you have the opportunity to take any job on any TV show, and you want to work in television, you should take that job. It's, there's so many people that want to do these jobs, and it's so hard to get your foot in the door. That it it should not matter if it's in the department you want, it shouldn't matter if it's, you know, in the genre you want, like just start working in TV and getting getting a foot in the door somewhere, is super, super helpful.

You know, I'm one of the senior writers on the show or other senior writer, what started as the writers assistant, it is so much easier to promote people from within, because they're there every day, they know the show, they know how things operate. And that literally goes all the way down to the PA level, like on our show, people that started out as PAs end up becoming transcribers or assistants, and then it it's, again, it's just so much easier to move up.

So I would not in any way scoff at an unpaid job, honestly, even the entry level paid jobs are, you're still going to probably have to have figured out some other way to get, you know, to supplement that income anyway. So I'm always of the mindset just get in any way you can. And I would say one good thing in late night specifically for a lot of those really entry level jobs, because they're at giant companies like CBSViacom and NBCUniversal, they're like obligated to list a lot of those really, really entry level jobs on their websites.

Like there's a, I don't have it in front of me, but it's like NBCUniversal careers.com or something or something like that. If you look on those specifically I'm in New York, but they probably have jobs in LA too, you can find the kinds of jobs I'm talking about, which is great, because for pretty much all other TV jobs, you really have to know someone who can help you get that job.

There's not like a website you can go to there's the UTA list in LA, there's like lists that go around of jobs you can apply to but it's it often comes from your professional network. And then the other piece I would say just about the sort of larger idea of breaking in and this time specifically, is I think there's sort of like two tracks of personal development that would be helpful to think about as you're like trying to know there's never like I broke in like a single moment it's like you're working constantly all the time and then eventually something lucky happens and you can take advantage of it. So I think there's like skill development and then there's like professional development. So the professional development right now is like email the people that you know that work in the industry, read Deadline Hollywood everyday and like understand how like what's happening in the business, that kind of stuff.

But then do not short the the skill development side which is like if you want to be a writer, especially a late night writer, you should be writing every day. Like no matter what and getting very, very comfortable with the idea of writing things that no one will ever say. I cannot stress to you. How breakneck the pace is in late night and how quickly you need to be able to write and comfortable you

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need to be able to write especially writing jokes fast and not being having any ego about most of them going into trash bin.

This is a perfect time to like really just flex that muscle to study all the kinds of TV shows that you want to write for be watching those breaking them down. You know if you want to work in late night, every day, you can be writing Colbert monologue jokes and jokes for Trevor and jokes for Sam, this is a great time to just like really focus in on that personal skill development stuff too.

35:06 Adam Chodikoff

Absolutely true. I, I agree with everything that was said, especially reading the trades, you know, getting, you know, a perfect look, you know, they always list new shows that are happening in the genesis stages, they need to hire people. They need TAs get your foot in the door. And yes, I agree.

You know, it's easier to do once you're getting promoted from within I absolutely second, though, everything that I've just said. And, you know, I'm doing well, you know, at school what, you know, also pay off as well. And I can tell the quick story.

When the Jo Miller, the former, you know, now former head coach, executive producer Full Frontal, she used to be a writer at The Daily Show. And when she got the Full Frontal gig, she asked me to find you know, for full frontal a version of me, you know, a researcher fact checker.

And I as like Sean Connery in The Untouchables, I decided I'll, I'll call. I'll go to the rookie stage I call Duke, I call a Bill Adair at Duke who's your who's your best prospects? And they said, This guy, Ishan, and I made the connection and a star is born.

So you know it because Ishan did so well at Duke. You know, Bill Adair, recommended me to him to be to Jo Miller. And that's how that's how Full Frontal came about. If I'm if I'm if I'm getting that, right.

36:26 Ishan Thakore

Yeah, no, that's about it. Maybe not the star is born part.

36:30 Adam Chodikoff

But you know, it's true. I mean, you know, it's, it's because you did so well, Bill, you know, recommended you to me, and I recommended you to Jo, and there you go. So it can happen that way.

36:44 Teig Hennessy '20

Yeah, that's such good advice, just to be I mean, I feel like we keep hearing that activate your network. So it's always good to have it reinforced again. Um, we're gonna jump to the next question, which is sort of in the same vein, um, Paul and Seth, like, looking back at your career, are there any sort of side hustle jobs that you guys have that like, were, you know, standouts? Or funny in any type of way? Um, and what would you say to people that are maybe a little hesitant to jump into this industry? Because of the, you know, the work outside of the field that you might have to do?

37:19 Paul W. Downs

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Ah, you know, yeah, I think you, I think everyone needs a side hustle. In the beginning. Like Seth said, even if it's a paid job, oftentimes, entry level jobs are ones that you need to supplement the income for. Here's my, I think you can go a couple of different ways.

For me, I had an internship that I got through Duke, that then I was hired by my supervisor to work for this entertainment marketing company, which was great because I had a job. But I actually looking back, I almost wish I had just waited tables and had done something a little bit more flexible and a little bit less desirable. Because in a way, having a job that was a little bit comfortable, I think I had less hunger and drive and desire than some people I know who had jobs waiting tables, and were like I in must stop this. You kind of have that, you know, it's sort of like you have this hunger because you really don't want to be doing that thing. And I kind of think that's a good fire to set for yourself.

Um, but yeah, I think it's, it's hard not to have a side hustle, especially in the beginning. You know, because it is really hard to break in and to get your first job. But yeah, I think it's, it's everyone's different, you know, in terms of what that is, what their threshold is, but I wish I had done with my fiance did which was just wait tables, because in a way, she wrote so much more and watched so much more into so much more than I was doing. You know, when I was like, using a Blackberry, it was like, what am i What is this? This is not what I want to do? Get me out of here.

But no, but it was, but I had health insurance that you know, so it was like, I could do this for a long time. Anyway, that's my personal take.

39:06 Seth Weitberg

Um, yeah, you're gonna need some kind of job to make money at first, you know, it's really hard to, you know, right away immediately get a job that that's paying you enough? I would say, Yeah, I think Paul's right to sort of two schools of thoughts, like, do you get something kind of mindless so that you have all of your creative energy, you know, when you get home to be writing and producing things on the weekend, or do you get something that's a little more creatively or, you know, satisfying in some way?

When I, I moved to Chicago to study improv right after school and my first job was as a first and second grade Montessori school teacher, which, which was very satisfying to me in a lot of ways, but it was, you know, I'd be out until one in the morning doing improv shows and then like, failing at running a reading group at eight in the morning. And so, you know, and I loved the job, but I also like, I eventually got hired at the Second City and had to, like, quit on a second grade classroom, you know, with like two months left in the school year, so not the best situation.

Um, I definitely think that you need something super flexible. I think one thing that's nice is the further you get in your career, a lot of those like side hustle kind of jobs are still like, in your field, you know, like, you can eventually get jobs, doing writing jokes for people or doing other kinds of copywriting or things like that, that will feel like not a total departure.

I also think and this sort of ties back to the other question about breaking into, it's really helpful to be able to do a ton of different things. And like, if I was, if I was just graduated or was about to graduate,

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and was had all the time in the world and didn't have a four month old son, I would learn to edit right now, like, I'm not, I'm not an editor. I'm a writer, and producer, but I would learn to like literally run Adobe Premiere and edit stuff, because especially a lot of the early, like, entry level jobs are on digital teams at big shows, that will expect you to be able to do everything. So shoot it, write it, produce it, cut it.

I mean, Paul, you know, has always been able to edit and broke in with a ton of his own stuff with his partner who, again, because they could they could do it all themselves. And I think being able to have that skill set is is super helpful, I think to the second part of your question about like, is now like a bad time to break in. Like, it's kind of always a bad time to go into entertainment. Like, it's not an easy job, you need to have a ton of grit, if you like really, really wilt in the face of rejection, or challenge, like it's not a good job field, it is a really, really hard job field. And you have to be able to persevere.

Even after you've been working in it a really long time, things come and go very quickly. And I think like everyone in the industry is feeling the stress of what's going on right now. It's not just people trying to get in. So there's a lot of just uncertainty in general, I would say, though, like, No, this is what you want to do. Like you need to do it, you need to try to get into this job, you need to work your butt off and try and do and I would not worry about the fact that like, the entire entertainment landscape is shifting beneath our feet while you're doing it. It's like it's, you'll have a big challenge at the beginning. And then, you know, things will will seem easier moving forward.

42:19 Chloe McGlynn '20

Awesome, thank you so much. Um, the next question I'm super excited about this. One is what books movies and resources, comedy and non comedy. Would you recommend? Do students check out during this time for writing inspiration, or just inspiring directors or works or something that's just really entertaining as a way to escape and or continue to develop as an artist, and that this is directed at Adam and Sofia.

42:48 Adam Chodikoff

I'll do a shameless plug the Daily Show oral history with, you know, does doing describe the genesis of the show, and it was written by a Duke alum, Chris Smith. So besides that, my all time favorite showbiz book about us about late night comedy is Saturday Night by Doug Hill and Jeff Weingrad, which is about the first 10 years of Saturday Night Live. And it goes, it's very in depth, there's people, there's a newer book that lives in New York, the oral history, this is a book that came out, I would say 25 years ago, but he's way level that's I'm reporting about the first 10 years of SNL is incredible. And I highly recommend it if you have time, you know, in terms of introduction to basic introduction, late night comedy along with the oral history.

43:41 Sofia Manfredi

Um, yeah, I think well, one thing I would say maybe this is like lessons and creative inspiration. But what Adam and Seth were saying before, just like reading trays, and like reading news, and knowing what's going on, in general is a good resource. I guess as far as like things that I mean, I think if you want to, I'm a writer, and I think if you want to be a writer, it is also great to just like read as many

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scripts as you can, in addition to like watching shows, and trying to figure out the structure as, as you watch them, things like that.

And I think it's now when you have like big blocks of time, it might be a good idea to like, go to the Blacklist and just like read or like, you know, find these collections of scripts that like people are excited about every year and, and and just read a bunch in a row and see like all the different genres and the different ways that people write things and sort of like different idiosyncrasies in their writing. It can be really fun to do that. And it's sometimes I don't know, I feel like a personal way that I'm trying to stay sane is like splitting things up into like, small discrete daily tasks.

And like reading a script today, I think is just a routine that has been helping me and I feel like every day is just like a different like, Oh, here's a horror movie that I I'm not that into horror, but like sure I'll be this why not like let's see what what was interesting about this and what do people who know about this genre thought was good enough about this to like, you know, to give it praise or to be excited about it. Um, I guess just as far as the thing that I'm watching right now, I have never really watched The Simpsons. I have seen episodes and passing on TV. And and yeah, so I'm going through just the early seasons right now and having the time of my life and I cannot recommend it enough.

45:26 Adam Chodikoff

Oh, I envy you. Oh, my gosh,

45:28 Sofia Manfredi

it's so fun. I get it. Yeah.

45:32 Chloe McGlynn '20

Thank you. And I actually want to open that question up to the rest of you, panelists to contribute. If you have something you're thinking about you want to share.

45:40 Seth Weitberg

I'll throw a shot real quick that Mike Sacks did a bunch of interviews with comedy writers. I think the first is called here's the kicker. And the second one, I believe, is called poking a dead frog. They're incredible. Just like interviews with literally every amazing, great comedy writer you could ever want to hear from. It's really humbling, it's really inspiring, I would I would highly recommend checking both of those.

46:08 Laura Valk

I think for any creatives, the book, Big Magic by Elizabeth Gilbert is amazing, and a good way to kind of remind yourself how to stay creative and the beauty of creativity. So I would highly recommend that as well.

46:31 Teig Hennessy '20

Anybody else? any must see TV out there right now?

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46:35 Adam Chodikoff

In terms of the power of research and fact checking, there are that many movies, but The Post is great, you know, Shattered Glass, also. And the old time you know my all time favorite is Frost Nixon, which shows the power of preparing for a big interview, you know, researching the right questions, you know, the Sam Rockwell quick characteristic, closest I'll ever see myself on screen.

In that we had Ron Howard on the show, I went backstage and said, finally I can go, you know, I can pick a date to a movie and see that's me up there, you know, you know, so that's five my favorite in terms of power of research.

47:15 Ishan Thakore

There's this graphic novel called Out on the Wire. And it's sort of explores how they make like This American Life and Radiolab and all these like great narratives, like radio shows. And I found it really helpful when you think about like structure and stuff for TV shows, as well, it sort of like, kind of applies to a lot of things like how you structure an interview and like, like how you like, you know, what you what this particular runner jokes, or part of a segment should accomplish and stuff. So it's like really, really helpful. And also, it's pretty easy read.

47:48 Teig Hennessy '20

Awesome. Well, thank you all so much for those awesome suggestions. Um, all right, Ishan, you're back up. And this time, it's with Dillon. Um, so how have you guys use your experiences at Duke University? You know, being in this environment in your current role? I'm sure research, you know, is a huge part of that. Um, and then what would you suggest to current Duke students people who aren't graduating that you know, they take advantage of while they're still in school?

48:19 Ishan Thakore

Yeah, sure. I studied public policy in school and wasn't really with some focus on journalism later on and documentary but wasn't really sure what I wanted to do but I was able to travel a ton on Duke's time, it was like, I applied to like every random independent study and research grant I could find, just to you know, just to travel kind of and to and to work on a project I was interested in.

And I found that super super helpful later on, because it's sort of like expanded the topics I was interested in and so part of the field team in Full Frontal we just tried to pitch like any story any any random story that we can make a segment out of that speaks to like a larger theme. So I found like all those international experiences really, really helpful. So just in terms of like worldview and stuff, so yeah, I mean, Duke has a ton of money so if there's like I'm not sure like where it's centralized now, but they used to have like a funding page that I would check out like all throughout the semester to see like how I could possibly game this system and try to go somewhere so I found that super helpful and then I ended up doing like two or three independent studies throughout school which I also found really helpful because you can get to know a professor a little bit better and they can guide you on a topic you're interested in.

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So like as Adam was mentioning, I did an independent study with Bill Adair which eventually helped me get my job on Full Frontal and it was all about like, new ways to fact check and how you can do like real time fact checking and stuff. So stuff like that I found like really helpful and any you know, everyone was speaking towards like the power of doing like your own independent projects. And like Amy, I don't know, if you still teach that class the like the video class where we profile entrepreneurs, but it was all about like, it was like getting into practice of like making your own short documentaries and stuff. And that class helped me so much because I finally learned how to shoot video. And I was terrible at it for for many years, but I feel like I've finally like reached the stage that's like, mildly decent. And you know, like doing that had this you had the outlet to like, try and like sort of creatively fail. And then and then like, keep trying again.

Like one thing I remember from that class, it's like we interviewed the owner of Bull City Burger like five times because we couldn't figure out like, how to get the camera working every time we went, just like poor man just sat through like, five hours of interviews for like, literally one minute to be posted on the YouTube site. Viewed by like 80 people. If that. So yeah, it was stuff that stuff like that really helped like kind of that nurturing environment to like, try something creative and then fail.

51:08 Dillon Fernando

Yeah, I was a biology major. And so I did something completely different from, I guess, the career path I took now. But it really helped. I also did research on viruses. And during that time, did all that stuff. So it's really helpful now when we are doing like segments about Coronavirus, and constantly factchecking people saying random stuff on and I don't know, sometimes even people on our own team will say some stuff and then we just have to be like, rather than this is not it's not correct.

Um, so I found that even like, just doing what you find interesting, like, even though you won't find something that directly translates into a job you might have in TV, like kind of teaches you how to think and how to work and how to, like at least some fact checking, I found science background really helpful. Because you're always you're kind of like looking for a question that you want to answer. And you have to go about it several different ways, whether it's this experiment or something else. But I think that's the same way with like, if we want to, like backtrack, like the statement, like, where do we go? Who are the sources? How do we dig in? How do we investigate? I think that's an even with research, I think that those two things that sustain mental process that I found really valuable.

Also, yeah, as you said, there are a lot of funding sites. In Duke, someone gave me \$5,000, I don't remember who I did that. And I, I went to New York, and I got an unpaid internship. And I couldn't have done it without that. So if they'd still do that, I would find out who that is and get up money. And just doing stuff that you find fun and creative. I worked at The Chronicle. And, like, wrote for the arts section, I was the editor for the arts section. And I thought that was really fun. It really exposed me to a lot of different creators and like learning how they think. And that was really kind of what got me interested in this field. And oh, yeah, I echo a lot of things that Ishan said, about just using Duke's money.

53:12 Teig Hennessy '20

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Yeah, no, I'm so into that idea. And I'd love to hear how like other people have, you know, if other people have stories, just because I want to hear your funny stories to, um, like unexpected ways that, you know, Duke your experience at Duke has added to like your creative career.

53:28 Sofia Manfredi

I so I was also a biology major. So Whoo, Dillon. And I agree with like, the, like the scientific processes is like helpful is just sort of as an analytical tool. But it helps me or at least I was told that it helped me in the sense that when I was like, applying for my first for like, an internship Clickhole it was just like an open application on the internet.

It the bulk of what I had done in college was Primate Research for like four years and there was like very, there wasn't that much other stuff. And it was apparently just like weird and for the people who are reading the resumes they were kind of just like, what the fuck is that? And then it was like interesting enough that I got an interview. So it could be helpful in that it might just like surprise people and have them question why you're applying and then just take out in that way, but I don't know.

54:18 Dillon Fernando

That's how I got my internship actually, though, right? Because they told me that Yeah, yeah. Like who is this person? Why would they want to do anything related to TV and so yeah,

54:27 Sofia Manfredi

yeah, it's useful I guess to just be for people to be surprised that you're interested in at all but I also did take a bunch of money from Duke and echo that strategy for sure.

54:40 Seth Weitberg

What else is just say like, I definitely think it's true and late night but really across the board in writing is like it's incredibly helpful to be in interested and interesting person and just know stuff. Just be really interested in whatever field and know things about it. You know, I think like practically like on our show, for example, there's definitely some writers who are incredibly well versed in, like what's going on in international news.

And there's other people that are just like local civics junkies. And there's people that are more into science and cybersecurity in those sorts of things. So having that kind of just like interest level helps in a practical sense, but like, no matter what you are studying or invested in at Duke, like those things, you're going to draw on them all the time in your in your writing. And don't undersell, like, you know, if you're still a student, they're like, seeking out course, subjects, if you can fit them in that are just like, super interesting to you, because you want to know more about that stuff and enrich that part of, you know, your, your own brain.

55:41 Paul W. Downs

I totally agree with that. I don't know if there's programs to still exist to do. So I was a Program II major Wow. Meaning that I got to design my own. But what I did was I just took classes from the best professors in any discipline that I could find. And I think to echo what Seth was saying, it just kind of

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gave me a breadth of knowledge and experience that I wouldn't have had if I just studied theater or creative writing or something like that.

So I think yeah, the more you can take advantage of the people that are active because there are so many incredible professors. One thing that I used to do is, I used to just say to a professor, if I really loved them, who on this campus do you wish you could take class from and then the next semester, I would sign up for that class, because I was a Program II major I was kind of able to do it more easily than you might otherwise. But it really did, I think help give me things to draw and reference in my writing that I use to this day.

56:38 Adam Chodikoff

Being a poli sci major has obviously helped me at The Daily Show over the over the over the decades now, we've dealt with so much legislation such as the drug bill, the 911 first responder bill. So having that, you know, intense, you know, how how a bill becomes a law type background, you know, you know, John or Trevor will turn to the for the explanation of, of policy or the political process and having that Duke poli sci background is definitely helped.

57:05 Chloe McGlynn '20

Thank you guys, great answers. And really, like cool for us to get to hear your experience and see how ours kind of aligns with that, or, I don't know, we all are interested in do so many different things. So it's always reassuring to hear that. Um, but this next question is that it's directed at Laura and Seth, and but many of you have written your own shows, or directed or produced your own work. And we wanted to know what your advice was for students and alumni trying to spearhead their own creative projects right now and in the future?

57:43 Laura Valk

Or, um, I think like echoing what we were talking about at the beginning, making things on any budget, don't letting budget be something that stops you. And when I was interviewing people, when I was interviewing, like interns, or entry level people, my first my first job, we never talked about hard skills, because in television, you don't quite need hard skills at the beginning. And I correct me if I'm wrong, and factchecking maybe you do and things like that, but you can learn a lot on the job.

So my interviews were always much more about, like, who that person was and what they had made and what they were creating, than it was about like, do you know how to work Scripto like this. So kind of, as we've been saying, like, make stuff make what you love, find what you love, find people you love working with, I think that is huge. And there's no time to do that, like college or right after college. Find the people that like light a fire in you and and those people that like when you're working on something you like you forget that time exists. Like that's the feeling you want to go for. And when you find that, like that's what you should be doing.

We've said utilize Duke resources. I do a lot of music I like lived in Small Town Studios, when I was at Duke and I paid myself to work on my own music through Dukes time, which was like insane. And I think in making stuff like the last thing I would say is I even to this day, I still struggle with this, like I always felt if I wasn't working with a big studio budget or something, I would always feel very amateur.

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And I think trust your taste and trust, kind of trust yourself and your and find some hopefully try and find some confidence in yourself in what you're making. Because I think something I ran into when I first got into the industry was not believing that I should be in that room or that I was worthy of being in that room.

And I can almost guarantee that everyone on this call is very, you know is accomplished and smart and perfectly capable. So that's something I wish that I had done and believed in myself and making my own things so that I would feel more competent myself first entering the business. So you're all very capable and you know, believe that.

1:00:04 Seth Weitberg

Yeah, I think that's all great advice I can, I cannot underscore enough the importance of just making things. And for some of you writers who maybe are not interested in producing at all, definitely just writing things is super important. I think like on the front end, it's, it's really important to be able to kind of answer the question for yourself, like, why are you specifically writing this thing or making this thing later on your careers when you're like in rooms and trying to sell things, the question that people always want to know is like, why are you the person who can do this, and no one else can do this?

So just understanding that for yourself, will just inform the work and help it be more personal to you. I think Laura's point about collaborating is like, so key. Because TV is one of the most, if not the most collaborative mediums, you know, in general, on our show, we have like, a writing staff, but then we have a graphics team that's twice that size, we have an investigative journalism team, that's three times that size. So like, we're constantly working with other people, you know, you know, aside from just the production, folks, so I'm just starting to learn those lessons.

You know, like, Paul, and I used to work together at Duke, I can't tell you how many times we shouted at each other and fell on our face and failed at things. I went to Chicago, fell on my face and failed constantly. It's like, you need to learn those lessons and get better and better at it. And also, because as I'm sure all these folks would attest to one thing about working in TV is you are spending inordinate amounts of time with other people.

And just learning the skills of like, being a good person to work with and be around is also really, really important. Like it's that works well, you know, works and plays well with others, you know, from kindergarten, it really is like, essential, and being someone that people want to be around and work with. So I think that's part of it, too. And I'll just say two other really quick things.

One, I think it's sometimes hard when you're starting out to hold yourself to the highest standard with your work. And I would just say like, try not to settle for good, keep pushing things to make them as great as you possibly can now, and the last thing I wanted to mention was about getting notes from people, something I've like struggled with for a long time was like getting, how to get notes from other people on my writing that was like helpful in any way.

And I think that like a lot of times, no matter who it is, there'll be a lot of like, well, this sucks, or this is great. And those things can be helpful. Sometimes people want to pitch you fixes for things, and that,

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you know, they're pitching jokes or ideas that can be helpful times. But like, the most helpful thing that I found in, in showing people my writing is like, literally just trying to understand what was confusing.

What didn't what like stopped you what didn't make sense to you what wasn't clear, if someone does pitch you something that's like, oh, well, what if you did this instead? Try to ask the follow up question like, what are you reacting to in the script that makes you want that? Because like, honestly, in my writing, I get the best notes from my wife, who is not in the industry at all, but it's just like a smart person and a good reader. You may or may not get, you know, notes from other people who are in this field or not, but like always being able to get back to that question of like, what isn't working right in the script, as opposed to just getting feedback on on what you should do differently? And...scene.

1:03:45 Teig Hennessy '20

Awesome, thank you so much. That was such a good answer. Um, and we're actually about to jump into our last question of the night. So, um, this is for Andrew and Adam. Um, what do you guys think the industry is gonna look like after all of this? You know, what do you think the long term changes are going to be? And, you know, is it something you're excited about? Maybe nervous?

1:04:10 Adam Chodikoff

I like working from home. In sweatpants. I know, that sounds like a tacky comedic observation at this point. But I think, you know, it's, I think, especially as we do the show, obviously, in midtown Manhattan, it's gonna take a while for us to fully come back. It's definitely above my paygrade but that level of decisions, but I think obviously, the show is going to be more you know, no video chat oriented or email oriented and we know it's gonna be a while until we actually have to hopefully hopefully soon, which we have an audience in the studio but that's certainly tough you know, until God knows when so I think you know, as long as as far as I can tell we're gonna be doing the show from Trevor's apartment, you know, from No, and as long as this last and I don't I don't I I'm tired to speculate about future and how this will affect the industry, in particular.

1:05:04 Andrew Tunnard

Yeah, I mean, I agree that. I will say, though, that, you know, The Tonight Show, when we first all went home, we weren't really sure what it was going to look like the next few months. And it quickly snapped together into something that I'm pretty impressed with, as someone who really has no has no creative input into the show at all, you know, just sort of as an outside observer, but someone who was there when a lot of these decisions were made, it was really impressive how nimble the shows were, and I think that sort of is across the board with with all the late night. And sort of satire shows.

And I think this is, you know, it's ultimately for the better, I think it's sort of it stretched a lot of people creatively, it's sort of made people go back to the well and rethink how things are done. And I also think, for a lot of us at home, the late night shows have kind of, you know, taken back the place that maybe they used to have more, you know, in years past where people sit around and watch them, you know, maybe not at 1130 or 130. But now, you know, on YouTube during the day, and you know, our numbers are up. And I think people are sort of taking comfort in things that they remember existing back when things were back to normal.

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And I think that that's sort of I know, it's it's motivated a lot of us on the show to work harder and to keep producing stuff not knowing, like Adam said, when things will be back in front of a studio audience and thinking this may be the new normal, and how do we make this better each day as we work on Zoom, and, you know, through all these sort of new methods of production, and I'm excited, I don't know, excited as a word I thought around at this time, but I'm encouraged, I guess, but by what I've seen, and looking forward to, you know, what the show's gonna look like all the shows are gonna look like over the next few months for sure.

1:06:47 Teig Hennessy '20

Yeah, that's awesome. And I'd love to hear what other people are excited about or encouraged by right now within the industry. And like how you see people innovating and like changing up the game. Anyone feel free to jump in.

1:07:05 Seth Weitberg

I mean, I'll just say briefly, like our shows, kind of had fits and starts and getting up and running with a, like a quarantine edition. And we're finally starting to get things in motion. Seeing our executive producers, though, figure out how to take like a show that has, I think, probably the most intensive graphics, you know, of any live TV show, and figure out how to translate that into a way that's going to be interesting to watch with no audience, you know, and shoot the show, basically, on a green screen, which is what we're going to do. Don't tell anyone, it has been unbelievably impressive. And you really do see like the the skill, especially of our graphics team, like they have already won Emmys, they are incredible. Seeing them figure out how to take like, what they do and are used to doing on a multi million dollar set of screens, and and make it much more, you know, sort of two dimensional is, is super inspiring.

1:08:09 Paul W. Downs

Yeah, and I think you know, what, to speak to that, whether it's people who are on the writing side, or people who are on the production side, I think another encouraging thing is that it is it's an area where people are have to be problem solvers and be creative, you know, even if it's like, we don't have the budget to shoot in a mansion, how are we going to make that work?

I think that is something that the people in the industry, are problem solvers, and are always looking to be creative. And I, I'm encouraged by that, that as we slowly come back and find ways to come back, because every industry is gonna have to adjust. I think we are in a unique position and well suited to do that kind of thing.

1:08:47 Sofia Manfredi

I'm encouraged by also, I mean, I have the same graphics team as Seth, and I'm, like, blown away by them. But also just, I feel like the people, I feel like our executive producers and our showrunner are just really trying their hardest on our behalf and like they're really going to the mat for us with all the decisions that are a million miles above me, but I feel like for an industry that at least before I was in it, I was worried was cutthroat or sort of callous, or all these different things, or has this reputation of being those things, I feel like, at least in my world, people are really looking out for each other.

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And there's a sense of sort of community and sort of everyone is trying their best to make things worth the best that they can and that there's just been the like environment and that sort of the the way that people are with each other right now in general is something that I find encouraging.

1:09:51 Chloe McGlynn '20

Yeah, thank you guys for all of that. This has been a super rich, awesome hour can get a round of applause for our panelists, even though a lot of people are on mute --that's it. Thank you so much.

OUTRO: Dave Karger 57:28

That's it for this episode of DEMAN Live. I'm DAVE KARGER, DEMAN is a signature program of Duke Arts and Duke Alumni Engagement and Development. Follow DEMAN on social and stay updated at DukeDEMAN.com, that's d e m a n.com where you can find our full archive of episodes. Thanks so much for joining us. See you next time.

This episode was produced by me, Lilly Clark, in collaboration with Hear at Duke, Duke's student run podcast hub. Our theme song is "Carolina" by Cameron Tompkins.

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